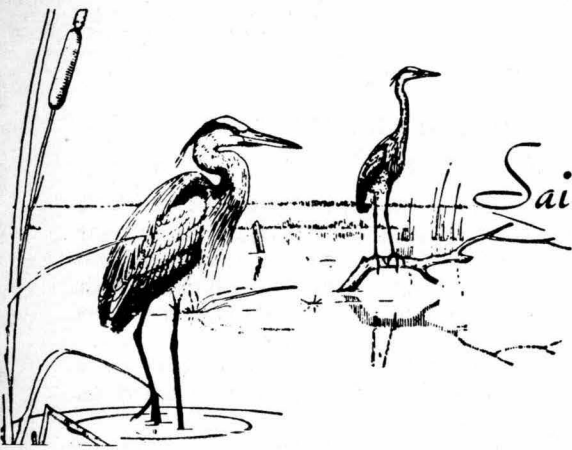




Saint Louis Audubon

Bulletin

November, 1963

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CHESTER P. LYONS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1963

Third Baptist Church, Grand and Washington — 8:15 P.M.

"NATURE'S PLANS AND PUZZLES"

The St. Louis Audubon Society in conjunction with the Academy of Science and the St. Louis Zoo Association will sponsor an unusual Audubon Wildlife Film that will be a treat for all who see it.

Mr. Chester P. Lyons, the narrator, was born near Regina, Saskatchewan, in Canada, but his family moved to British Columbia a few years later. He is a graduate of the University of British Columbia where he took his degree in Forest Engineering. In later years, his work with the Parks Division of the British Columbia Forest Service took him to many of the most scenic areas of the province about which he has written and published books. As officer in charge of special projects in British Columbia's Department of Recreation and Conservation, Mr. Lyons has several fields of interest. He supervised the clearing made necessary by the giant hydro-electric project of the Aluminum Company of Canada. He designed and supervises the "Stops of Interest" program along the highways of British Columbia. He is currently involved in the restoration of the pioneer goldmining town of Barkerville in the Cariboo. His memberships include the Association of British Columbia Foresters, the American Institute of Park Executives and the American Association of Historic Site Public Officials.

Little more than a century ago the Indian ruled the Canadian Province of British Columbia, the setting for this film. He too sought the deeper significance of Nature's works. Much of the Indian world remains today in British Columbia—a vast outdoor laboratory for those who seek to know the meaning of what they see.

Against the magnificent backdrop of native scenery, varying from dense coastal forests through a desert climate to alpine heights, we explore Nature's wonders. "Nature's Plans and Puzzles" awakens an appreciation of how wonderfully everything is adjusted to its own way of life.

Mr. Lyons will also present an afternoon lecture sponsored by the St. Louis Audubon Society at Country Day School.

DROUGHT — PHILOSOPHICALLY

By LOUIS G. BRENNER

The drought of the fall of 1963 will not be easily forgotten by those who find pleasure in the outdoors. It is indeed disheartening to see the Missouri landscape sear and gaunt at a season normally so full of the expectancies of riotous fall color. It is more than a little disturbing to hear the dry harsh rattle of leaves on the forest floor when migrating warblers should search thru leafy forest canopies for insects.

Asters that normally winked at us with clear blue or mauve eyes from sunny coppice borders were hardly to be recognized with buds blasted on December-like stalks. Thus deprived of some of the sensual pleasures of late September and October countryside many of us have speculated in climatic alteration by the atomic devices or even wrath evoked by divine power upon man. But cyclic drought has been an important feature of mid-western and Missouri climatic pattern for centuries past and thru it we find part of the reason why Missouri looks like "Missouri" with its prairie areas, rocky glades, cedar barrens, oak—hickory ridge forests, white oak—sugar mapleforest on lower slopes, and flood plain forests all represented as rather well defined habitats. Recurrent drought has effected natural selection among native plants developing a flora peculiarly able to withstand such trying conditions. Availability of water together with temperature and the quality of the soil largely determine the divisions between the major habitats in our mid-western area.

Because soil lying undisturbed exhibits little change even over long periods of time it remains then for climatic features, rainfall and temperature, to exact controlling limitations upon the habitat. Within the past year we have been able to witness an excellent example of the dual interaction of both climatic variables in an extremely cold winter and a severe autumn drought. Such conditions are wondrously designed to maintain the identity and purity of the habitat. Effects of the past drought season have been most pronounced in upland habitats as prairie, lime stone glade, oak—hickory and white oak—sugar maple. If the naturalist looks about him next spring he will note that most of the trees and plants showing signs of distress are of species not normally considered components of that immediate habitat.

Trees have greater demands for water hence exhibit more dramatic effects of drought. Trees such as elm and sycamore have light winged seeds that are blown great distances by wind. During moist years seeds of such trees germinate and develop in almost any habitat where small patches of bare ground with sufficient light are available. They then continue to grow as long as there is sufficient moisture to support growth. It remains then for seasons of drought to remove such species from the upland habitats and restrict them to flood plain and lowland woods habitats of which we consider them important elements. Naturalists should learn to look upon drought as a sort of natural predator designed to weed out the habitat and maintain its identity as an association of plant species naturally selected to endure all normal climatic extremes on that site.

This most recent drought along with the announcement by the weather bureau that we are now, over the past ten year period, behind in rainfall almost the equivalent of an entire year of normal precipitation should point out the urgency of water conservation if we are to preserve our woodland habitats. Land owners, even those of very small acreages, can do much to aid in this problem and in a most enjoyable fashion. The method is simple. All dead tree limbs and logs are arranged on the hillside in a horizontal

or level position so that in effect they act as small dams retarding the flow of runoff water following heavy rains. This permits more water to soak into the soil and about the tree roots. Limbs and logs laying in this position and close to the ground also hold dead leaves in place to decay into forest compost. Soon the limbs and logs also decay because of closer proximity to the moisture from the soil. If preferred, small dead trees up to 8 or 10 inch diameters may be felled with axe or power saw. All brush and logs from such downed trees is also disposed by arrangement on the contour (in level position) of the slope. **DO NOT CUT DEAD TREES MORE THAN 10 INCHES IN DIAMETER—SAVE THEM FOR DEN TREES IN YOUR WOODS.**

A serious mistake among land owners engaged in such a program is the attempt to "clean up" their woods by removing underbrush and lower growing limbs. Such material plays a most important role in buffering winds and if removed permits the winds to move thru freely and in doing so hasten the drying of the woods. The above maintenance program makes a wonderful chore for pleasant brisk winter days—while you're at it notice the differences in the buds on dormant twigs, the odors and grains of the different woods. It's a vigorous chore indeed. While you relax into cozy pungency of a leafy drift take a minute to explore the wonders of mosses, lichens and fungi with a small pocket hand lens. After several years of practicing such a maintenance program there will be a difference about your woods. Most noticeable will be the greater depth of woods soil or duff. Wildflowers will increase, indeed species not growing on your property in years past will appear as by magic.

While the effects of the past drought became most dramatic in late September and October the signs of distress in plants became evident as early as mid August. Nearly all species of late summer and early fall grasses and weedy plants that provide the bulk of winter food for sparrow and finch-like birds have been restricted in seed production. Food sources for these birds are at a very low level now with a long winter season still ahead. All persons are urged to fill the hoppers of the feeder early and keep them full. Add plenty of millet and small grass-like seed; chances are with the scarcity of these foods in weedy lots you may be able to enjoy experiences with species of sparrows not commonly attending your feeding area.

Christmas Bird Count

Sponsored by the St. Louis Audubon Society

Saturday, December 21 — Boschertown School House, Hwy. 94, St. Charles County. To reach it drive across the bridge at St. Charles, follow Hwy 94 north to school house located on Hwy. 94 at Hwy. B on the left side of the road. 8 A. M.

Sunday, December 22 — Arboretum — 8 A. M.

For further details call YO 5-8642 or GA 1-1721.

Sponsored by Webster Groves Nature Study.

Friday, December 27 — Mingo National Wildlife Refuge — 8 A. M.

Sunday, December 29 — Busch Wildlife Preserve. Meet at brick school house at the entrance. 8 A. M.

For further details call Jim Comfort WO 2-8373.

Because of the Christmas bird count the 2 scheduled trips in December to the Arboretum will not be held.

Friends

October 6 was the occasion of the second annual picnic at the Arboretum held by Friends of the Garden. More than 500 people enjoyed the outing. Some just picnicked by the lake side, others went fishing, and quite a few enjoyed the nature tours. One of the largest was led by Audubon member Louis Brenner, also a member of the Garden staff. An attentive group of more than 40 persons followed him for over an hour and were well rewarded for having done so. Louis' knowledge of the area is quite complete and he is also familiar with the history of individual portions of the terrain, including its current and recent plantings and its general condition a generation ago.



Dr. Anderson and Hugh Cutler together with Kenneth Peck led groups interested in the fauna of the area and Earl Hath, President of the Audubon Society, led several groups on bird walks.



Autumn Birding in the St. Louis Area

By EARL COMFORT

Our Autumn weather was strictly for the birds and for the birders if they preferred hot, dry weather. October, in particular, was noted for its many days of record breaking high temperatures, with the mean temperature considerably higher than that of September. As a direct result we lost many of our good shorebird mud flats which were dissipated by the prolonged drought. But we were compensated to some extent when mud flats appeared where ordinarily there is deep lake water.

The Mississippi River Illinois levee birding activity below the Jefferson Barracks Bridge shifted to other regions as most of the birds departed the vicinity of the dikes on their southward migration.

Calhoun County enticed many bird-minded visitors as Dick and Sally Vasse kept the U. S. Wildfowl Refuge under surveillance through checking trips started from their home in Grafton near the sanctuary headquarters. The refuge is supervised by Dick, ably assisted by Sally, who keeps a careful check on the numbers of the resident wildfowl. Local birders get a big break because they are recipients of reports of all rarities the Vassees turn up. Rarest species at the Swan Lake Refuge in October was the White-Fronted Goose scouted by Sally.

Another spot given a careful once over fairly often was the Grand Marais State Park in East St. Louis where Kathryn Arhos, Mary Neal Meinberg and Steve Hanselmann excitedly listed a Knot on October 2nd.

One of the very best birds listed locally was a Yellow Rail literally kicked up by Steve on the 5th at Creve Coeur Lake, which has also been the scene of stepped-up birding activity, a statement that is also applicable to the August A. Busch Wildlife Area and the Shaw's Garden Arboretum. The St. Louis Audubon Society resumed its Arboretum Nature trips and bird coverage in September after the termination of the trip cancellations during the school vacation period.

On the 6th of October a large gathering of the Friends of the Garden at the Arboretum enjoyed the day's outing where Earl Hath, Lanier Criger, Mary Wiese and others led field trip groups.

The first report of a regional Red-breasted Nuthatch for the year was credited to Earl Hath, the find appearing to touch off an avalanche of similar reports. The best place to check this active little hoarder is the Arboretum where several Redbreasts garnered the pine cone seeds to be tucked under the pine tree bark for winter storage to the delight of our group on the 19th.

Some other rare or interesting Fall species enjoyed were Sharp-shinned Hawk, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Wild Turkey, Sanderling, Wilson's Phalarope, Caspian Tern, Cape May Warbler, Pine Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler and Henslow's Sparrow. Steve Hanselmann gave us the Wild Turkey listing.

FALL BIRDING AT SWAN LAKE

By MRS. WM. D. (SALLY) VASSE

Fall is always an interesting time of year for me and this fall seems exceptionally so, probably because for the first time in years I have had time to watch the seasonal change closely. We are living in Grafton, Illinois where Dick has been assigned as Unit Manager for the southern part of Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge and I have had an opportunity to spend a great deal of time each week on the refuge. The Calhoun Unit of this refuge consists primarily of two lakes which lie on opposite sides of the Illinois River a few miles west of Grafton. Gilbert Lake, a shallow lake on the north side of the river, is an excellent shorebird and puddle duck area. Swan Lake (do not confuse this with Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri) is larger and attracts both diving and puddle ducks. This lake has been a favorite birding area for St. Louis birders for many years.

This, of course, has not been a typical fall; it has been much too warm and much too dry. But warm sunny days are much more pleasant than raw cold days and the drought makes it possible to drive on roads which might be impassable in a more typical year. Let those who have reason to complain do so; I shall not.

The fall waterfowl migration began during the last week of August with the arrival of some 300 blue-winged teal. "So soon!" said the local people when we told them of this, "It will be an early fall". Now this prediction has certainly not come true and, as most birders in the St. Louis area realize, the hypothesis upon which it was made is erroneous. These teal were not actually earlier than usual so even if we accept the idea that an early migration of teal would indicate an early fall there would be no reason for such a prediction this year. I mention this not so much to show that the local people don't know what they are talking about as simply to give an example of the kind of meaningless generalization we are all likely to make when we base our statements on something besides careful observation and written records. The fact is the fall migration started in a very normal way.

People who have censused waterfowl in this area in the past and who may be assumed to know what they are talking about claim that the migration has been very slow with many ducks and geese remaining farther north than usual due to the warm weather. This seems to be especially true of the mallard which is the duck that most hunters are interested in. But from the point of view of a birdwatcher who is more interested in a species count the season has been quite satisfactory. All the usual puddle ducks were present by the end of September and by mid-October four species of geese could be checked off. Several species of divers were seen by the end of the month and reports from hunters add the greater scaup and the oldsquaw to the list of ducks passing through. At least some birds do not wait for appropriate weather before migrating.

Now it is November and we still have many bright sunny days, but they are colder than they were a few weeks ago. And not all days are sunny. Last Wednesday was as cold and gray, as dreary a day as I have ever seen. I drove toward the ferry past the fishing cabins which huddled together, cold and deserted, by the edge of the river. The trees on the bluff still held their leaves but the colors were subdued now—only a faint indication of the red and gold of last week. The wind was raw, the ferry-man stayed inside the cabin of his tug as much as possible. Even the gulls which are usually around the landing were missing. Anyone with sense would stay home on a day like this but there is an old-wives tale among birders that the worse the

weather the better the birds. Anyway, I wanted to see if there were any eagles around.

The lake seemed almost empty by comparison with a few weeks, or even a few days ago. The big rafts of coots were missing; only small groups were seen scattered here and there. Most of the pintail and widgeon and probably all of the blue-wings and wood ducks have gone. Even the mallards seemed to be fewer in number. The most common ducks now are the ruddys and ring-necks and their numbers cannot compare with those of the other species. There were no eagles, no new species of ducks for the season, no rare grebes. The birding was almost as dull as the weather.

To say that the birding was dull on this day, however, shows a bad point of view. The fact that the numbers of coots dropped abruptly on Nov. 13 is of more real importance than the fact that a red-breasted merganser was seen on the 14th, but the latter is more exciting. There is no way to be sure when eagles really begin to move in without first spending considerable time looking for them in vain. Even on the dullest day a good many birds are seen and anyone who can appreciate the sight and sound of a flock of geese as they circle to land on the lake or who can enjoy the whistling of the widgeon, the quacking of the mallard or the hooting of a barred owl will enjoy a trip to the refuge.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CONVENTION

Fifty-Ninth Annual Meeting, Miami, Florida

A total of 33 people attended the Convention from the State of Missouri of which 11 were from St. Louis. There were 2 field trips organized and conducted by the Tropical Audubon Society and the Florida Audubon Society.

November 5 — Palm Beach Tour to Loxahatchie National Wildlife Refuge, Pine Jog Nature Center and Sanctuary. Here we met Rex Conyers, one of our former St. Louisians, who is now in charge of the Pine Jog Nature Center.

November 6-7 — Key West Tour with boat trip on Florida Bay, visit to Crane Museum of the American Indian, birding and botanizing in Key West, ride on picturesque conch train, visit to Audubon House and the Key Deer Refuge.

Our President, Earl Hath, was selected by Dade Thornton, President of the Tropical Audubon Society of Miami to be a co-leader with him on the 2 pre-convention trips.

November 8 — Greater Miami Tour, including search for spotted-breasted orioles, manatee; Rickenbaker Causeway; Miami Seaquarium; Crandon Park Zoo and Greynolds Park.

Two trips were sponsored by the National Audubon Society.

November 10 — All day bus trip to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

November 12 — All day bus trip to Everglades National Park in which a very large number of people participated. Earl Hath and Dade Thornton were co-leaders on one bus on both of these trips. Local birders might be interested in knowing that they turned in a total of 88 species. We believe that the highest was 103 turned in by the group led by Allen Cruickshank.

"Ducks at a Distance"

We have available a very informative booklet by the above title which is essentially a water fowl identification guide. Its colored pictures and descriptive matter identify practically all species of water fowl from bufflehead to white-winged scoters.

If you desire a copy please contact:

Earl H. Hath
GA 1-1721

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